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This paper is a content analysis of seventeen chapter books geared towards upper elementary and middle school aged children that feature twenty-three intellectually gifted child characters. The books were analyzed for the presence of themes mentioned in literature on the subject (isolation and resulting desire for acceptance, normalcy, and belonging) as well as gifted stereotypes often seen in media. The overall portrayal in the books of the gifted population's abilities was then compared to the real distribution of cognitive abilities in the population. Themes were largely handled well, with positive resolution for most characters, and stereotypes were mostly avoided. There was, however, an overrepresentation of profoundly intellectually gifted characters.

Headings:

Gifted children

Childrens literature

Content Analysis

Acceptance

Stereotypes

Cognitive ability

PORTRAYAL OF GIFTED CHILDREN IN CHILDREN'S CHAPTER BOOKS

by
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Introduction

Children can learn about the world through reading material, whether that instruction is intended or not by the author, and whether the instruction is overt or relatively hidden. From cautionary, moral tales of old to modern “problem novels” and books for children about life issues, authors show and explain the world to the next generation. This is important as, according to Feeney and Moravcik (2005), “Stories have tremendous power. They reach children’s hearts and minds and help them understand themselves and the world in which they live” (p. 20).

One vehicle for instruction in these novels is the portrayal of characters. Children are sponges for information around them. Children gather this information from a variety of sources, such as family, peers, and experience. Another source is story, as “...children can develop understanding of themselves and others through books” (Feeney & Moravcik, 2005, p. 20). If a child reads countless novels portraying a “type” of person in a certain light, the young reader may begin to view real people perceived to be of that “type” in the same light they were introduced to via their reading material. In this way, character portrayal becomes a powerful method of influencing the views of young readers. This is not necessarily a negative occurrence; bibliotherapy largely relies on readers noticing characters and situations similar to themselves and their situation. According to Iaquinta and Hipsky (2006), “bibliotherapy is the use of literature to teach about the issues that one personally faces through identifying with a character in the book” (p. 209). However, a child does not have to be approaching a book for

bibliotherapeutic purposes to learn from them. This is why portrayal is so important. If children are picking up on and forming opinions based, in part, on what they are reading, it would be preferable that they are getting information that is not wildly unrealistic or stereotypical.

Much research has gone into the portrayal of groups. A quick search of “portrayal” and “children’s literature” brings up papers discussing gender, race, and disabilities. Characters that would be considered a part of these groups are often found in children’s literature, whether as a main character (Melody in *Out of My Mind*) or a secondary character (Catherine’s friend Jason in *Rules*). What of another “type” of person – the gifted individual? For 2004 and 2006, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), 6.7% of US students in public elementary and secondary schools were defined as “gifted and talented” (p. 89). How are young characters that could be typed as intellectually gifted depicted in literature geared towards children ages 9-12?

Literature Review

Much is written on the intellectually gifted child, from scholarly articles and books, to pieces aimed at helping parents and educators of such children to blog posts by gifted children, all grown up, detailing their experiences. Especially from the studies detailing groups of such children, trends in development, whether cognitive, emotional, social, or physical, begin to surface.

Cognitive Development

According to the literature examined, the cognitive development of a gifted child is generally, and expectedly, accelerated (Steiner & Carr, 2003). Since measuring intellect via IQ testing is now seen as flawed, incomplete, or both, a child’s deviance

from what is average in terms of intelligence is more often measured by the level of work they are able to produce. Are they eight years old and working at the level of a ten-year-old, or a sixteen-year-old doing the same work? This type of comparative measuring ostensibly allows educators and caregivers to tailor the educational experience of the child. This approach is not unique to the education of gifted children.

So what aspects are measured when a child's intelligence is under scrutiny? If the main method of identification is comparison to what is considered "average," what is actually being compared? According to Steiner and Carr (2003), both cognitive developmental psychologists and gifted and talented educators usually observe four areas of cognition – "speed of processing, knowledge base, metacognition, and problem solving and strategic abilities" (p. 217). The time it takes an individual to work through a problem, breadth and depth of knowledge, metacognition, and ability to strategize can be seen in the other literature as well, especially in descriptions of gifted children, even if terms vary slightly (Halstead, 2003; Gross, 1993; Reis, 2003). Other indicators of giftedness mentioned are motivation, high self-concept, task commitment, vague references to ability, and creativity (Reis & Renzulli, 2004, p. 119). Such areas are indicators of all levels of intelligence; a gifted child, however, would be seen to function at a higher (more advanced) level at a younger age.

Note that this does *not* mean every gifted child is a little adult scientist; they simply approach and work through information at a level usually seen in an older individual (Cross, 2009). According to Gross (1993), intelligence is generally more of a scale, with "degrees, as well as types, of giftedness" (p. 7) with most gifted children falling in the "moderately gifted" (p. 7) range.

Social and Emotional Development

While the focus of an intellectually gifted child's development may be expected to focus on their overt intellectual difference, much is also said about the trends in these individual's social and emotional development. This may be (in part) a response to, as Reis and Renzulli (2004) put it, "a rather skewed view of gifted and talented youth as the "dorky" misfit" (p. 119). Is such a stereotype disproportionately represented in the actual population of gifted children, and if so, is this a direct result of the child's abilities... or is it more of a secondary result due to an individual's experiences and/or personality?

According the Reis and Renzulli (2004), children on the gifted side of things are not inherently socially or emotionally obtuse. From what they observed there was no real developmental difference, only potential risks. Mentioned were, "issues deriving from their academic advancement ... and from unevenness in their development," "underachievement and perfectionism" and potentially "dual identification as twice exceptional, such as having a learning disability or attention deficit and also having talents and gifts" (p. 121).

A child's uneven development, their understanding or at least being aware of topics without necessarily being emotionally developed to a degree able to deal with said knowledge, can seem to others as if the child is emotionally underdeveloped. Precociousness in one area can cause others to unfairly expect precociousness in other areas. According the Reiss and to Renzulli (2004), "Gifted and talented children often have fears that are similar to those of older children but they do not know how to cope with these fears as older persons do" (p. 122).

Intellectually gifted students may also struggle with underachievement and/or perfectionism, two almost opposite-seeming concepts (Cross, 2009; Reiss & Renzulli, 2004). While these traits are not solely found in an intellectually gifted population, they are common among those who are a part of that population. Lack of stimulation and challenge at school is the main perpetrator here, not the giftedness itself. If not challenged, the child may be robbed of developing resiliency, as they only have to put forth perhaps half the effort of their age-mates to achieve the same (or better) result. Easily achieved “correct” results, then foster an expectation of future “correct” results. As the child grows and this becomes less easy, non-resiliency then prevents them from pushing through the experience. (Cross, 2009; Gross, 1993; Reiss & Renzulli, 2004).

Physical Development

While physical development stereotypes exist due to the “dorky misfit” stereotype mentioned above, it really is not addressed as much as the intellectual, emotional, or social development of the young intellectually gifted population. This could be due to the stereotype’s lessening in the last eighty years as “students with gifts and talents are as equally mentally and physically healthy... as the general population of students” (Cross, 2009, p. 30).

Just as was mentioned about social and emotional development, physical development is not any different in the gifted population than the general population. The only type of development their intellectual difference impacts directly is their cognitive development. For other forms of development to be contingent on differences in cognitive development would be the equivalent of someone assuming a physically mature child must also be cognitively mature, just because they grew at a different rate.

Importance of Portrayal

Literature specifically about the impact or importance of portrayal of gifted children in literature aimed at their age group is hard to come by. Literature about impact or importance of portrayal in books, in general, is also difficult to find, most of it being about other media (television, movies, etc.) and the impact of advertising. However, there is literature in spades on the importance of portrayal of groups that are often misrepresented in children's literature, at least historically. In one study by Trepanier-Street and Romatowski (1999), children were exposed to books and accompanying activities featuring adults in non-stereotypical gender-roles. A comparison of pretest and posttest responses to the researcher's questions indicated that a change in portrayal influenced the children's ideas of what was an acceptable role for each gender (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1999, 155-159).

In an unrelated article by Iaquina and Hipsky (2006) detailing bibliotherapeutic strategies with children, the authors explored how books portraying children dealing with ADD could be used to help children who have ADD and also children who do not. The approach helped children with ADD by allowing them to identify with the character and allowed children without ADD to understand what was actually going on, recognize similarities in struggles they also dealt with, etc. (Iaquina and Hipsky, 2006). In such situations, truthful, accurate representation would be necessary to allow maximum identification and empathy, because, according to Feeney and Moravcik (2005), "children can develop understanding of themselves and others through books" (p. 20).

In addition to a bibliotherapeutic impact, and as mentioned above, books help children to nurture empathy for others they are not usually exposed to. Feeney and

Moravcik's (2005) article on literature as a means to understanding others and ourselves focuses on these concepts. While this article focuses more on pre-school aged and younger elementary students and their exposure to a variety of picture books, it brings up some important ideas, as evidenced in their section on "Some Questions to Ask When Selecting Books for Young Children." Of the twenty questions asked, two stood out as especially relevant to the topic of portrayal of gifted students in literature aimed at ages 9-12: "Does the book help children feel competent?" and "Are the characters represented authentically and respectfully?" (Feeney & Moravcik, 2005, p. 26)

Methodology

According to Earl Babbie (2012), "Content analysis is a social research method appropriate for studying human communications through social artifacts" (p. 356). As this paper is hoping to understand what is being communicated about the young gifted population through children's literature, content analysis of a selection of books seemed appropriate. Since what is being said about a group in literature is often implicit rather than explicit, a latent content analysis approach seemed to be more illuminating than a manifest content analysis approach.

As I was well aware coding for and analyzing these books depended on my subjective ideas and interpretations of concepts such as giftedness, a qualitative approach suited the purposes of the paper far more than a quantitative one. I hoped to delve into the language being used and what was conveyed through the language, and since qualitative content analysis "goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of

categories that represent similar meanings” this method seemed appropriate (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

Data Collection

In order to find appropriate books for the content analysis, several parameters had to be set up. The first was which ages to focus on. According to Erikson, ages 5-12 are the time when most children are gaining self-confidence in their abilities, are learning how to interact with others, and are looking outside of themselves for acceptance and recognition. As this age range includes upper elementary to middle grade children (9-12) and this is the time most children really start reading chapter books, ages 9-12 were chosen. In addition to this parameter, I had to decide how I was going to define “giftedness” for purposes of the paper and what genres were to be explored. Though multiple forms of giftedness occur, intellectual giftedness was the type I decided to focus on. The reasoning for this was that, of the chapter books I was gathering about giftedness in general, this form was the one consistently described as isolating or “othering.” Genre-wise, I considered including only non-fantasy and non-science-fiction titles, in the hopes of avoiding books that are not trying to represent reality, and then judging them unfairly. However, since fantasy and science fiction are popular and their portrayal of groups still influences readers in spite of their obvious departure from reality, I decided to include any genre.

Books were then chosen based on reviews and professional databases of children’s literature, specifically NoveList K-8 Plus, and Children’s Literature Comprehensive Database. Both databases include search engine functions that allow the user to use appropriate search terms to find titles (genius, gifted, and gifted and talented

were used) but also allows faceting based on age (9-12 in the case of NoveList K-8 Plus). After finding an appropriate book record, I would also take note of read-alikes mentioned for potential inclusion. The rationale for relying on these databases was that educators, librarians, caregivers, etc. often rely on databases and search engines such as these to provide children with books featuring types of characters, whether for bibliotherapeutic purposes or recreational reading. If these are the books featuring gifted characters that adults are recommending, how are the books recommended portraying the population?

The list of books includes:

- Clements, A. (2004). *The Report Card*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Colfer, E. (2001). *Artemis Fowl*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books.
- Dahl, R. (1988). *Matilda*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.
- Davies, J. (2007). *The Lemonade War*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Draper, S. M. (2010). *Out of My Mind*. New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
- Graff, L. (2010). *Sophie Simon Solves Them All*. New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux Kids Books.
- Gutman, D. (2006). *The Homework Machine*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
- Klages, E. (2006). *The Green Glass Sea*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.
- Korman, G. (2012). *Ungifted*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- L'Engle, M. (1962). *A Wrinkle in Time*. New York, NY: Square Fish.

- Neff, H. (2007). *The Hound of Rowan*. New York, NY: Yearling.
- Riordan, R. (2005). *The Lightning Thief*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books.
- Rowling, J. (1997). *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Sobol, D.J. (1963). *Encyclopedia Brown, Boy Detective*. New York, NY: Dell Yearling.
- Stewart, T. L. (2007). *The Mysterious Benedict Society*. New York, NY: Hachette Book Group.
- Woodson, J. (1992). *Maizon at Blue Hill*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.
- Yee, L. (2003). *Millicent Min, Girl Genius*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

Prior to analyzing the texts, each title and reviews of each title were read to make sure each title was actually aimed at the age group, to prevent an inappropriate title from being included by accident.

Data Analysis

Each title that was included in the list of books was analyzed for inclusion of gifted characters, adherence to or deviance from typical cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development for the gifted population, recurring themes, and also negative and positive views on giftedness present in the novels. Demographic attributes associated with each gifted character were also noted: age, race, gender, family status, and socio-economic status depicted in the selection of books helped show trends in portrayal.

For purposes of identifying intellectually gifted child characters in the texts, I assumed that a character was gifted if the character was defined as such in reviews and/or

summaries, was defined as such by a character in the book, or they exhibited characteristics showing accelerated cognitive development as defined previously (being portrayed as mentally “older” than age mates.)

Physical, emotional, and social development for gifted characters was also noted, to see if there was overrepresentation of characters deviating from the norm in these areas. As giftedness does not impact these developments directly, it should show relative adherence to departures in the greater population. Allowances were made for potential secondary impacts on these developments, such as isolation begetting fewer social interactions, which may cause slowed social development.

Themes were also looked for while reading and re-reading the titles. As isolation and stereotypes (mainly the physical, emotional, and social development stereotypes mentioned previously) were commonly brought up in the literature these were searched for from the first reading. A related theme to isolation, acceptance, or perceptions of “normal,” and belonging, was noticed several books into the first reading. It was then added as a theme to look out for.

Overall realistic portrayal was then looked into. Since the real population of gifted children would mostly be moderately gifted, with fewer and fewer individuals belonging to higher levels of intellectual giftedness, the selection of books was analyzed to see how it adhered or deviated from this reality. Reasons for any authorial deviance from this norm were then postulated.

Limitations

This content analysis was limited in several ways, both purposefully and not. In addition to not being generalizable, especially due to the selection of books not being

necessarily representative of the larger body of literature for English-speaking children, it was also based on several assumptions and was delimited to a certain group within a group being studied. The study was also not trying to make any judgments or provide any courses of action; it was simply asking how gifted characters are portrayed as that can be important. How a child is impacted by a text is largely dependent on that child, their tastes, their experiences, etc. How one intellectually gifted child perceives the character of Charles Wallace Murray in *A Wrinkle in Time* could vary considerably from another intellectually gifted child's perception.

This paper assumes the existence of a gifted population. It also assumes that within the gifted population, as it is made up of individuals, there will be variances in giftedness, with most falling more towards average than some idea of super genius. This assumption is not always the case in child development or educational literature. This paper, however, has accepted the idea that just like physical development can be different in process and ultimate result, so can cognitive development. It does not place any extra or value or stigma on the gifted population, it simply assumes that all children should be able to meet their highest potential, and an intellectually gifted population may need slightly different considerations. Since the group's existence is assumed, it seems reasonable that individuals within the group may be affected by portrayals in popular culture, including children's literature.

I specifically chose to focus *only* on intellectually gifted children, as defined earlier. While many other forms of giftedness exist, this paper only focused on the portrayals of intellectually gifted characters in chapter books geared towards 9-12 year olds.

Analysis

Analysis of the portrayal of gifted children in chapter books was done by studying gifted characters in seventeen books. In addition to sometimes including more than one gifted character, some books also featured gifted secondary characters. Each of these characters and their stories were analyzed for general descriptions of giftedness, presence of recurring themes noticed in books featuring gifted characters, and finally realism of portrayal of the gifted population.

Main Characters

In *The Report Card* by Andrew Clements, Nora Rowley is a fifth grade super-genius with a perfect and complete memory. When faced with the pressures of standardized testing practices and grade obsession, Nora emerges from her purposefully average persona in order to expose the negative impact these practices have on children. In *Out of My Mind* by Sharon M. Draper, Melody Brooks, eleven-year-old, also has a nearly perfect and complete memory. However, unlike Nora, Melody has always yearned to express her innermost thoughts but is unable to communicate due to having cerebral palsy. When a communication device frees her up a bit and she is included in a classroom of her peers, Melody then has to learn to navigate making friends, proving herself, and dealing with bias against people with disabilities. Sophie Simon, the heroine of Lisa Graff's *Sophie Simon Solves Them All*, has no need of friends as the resident genius of third-grade. When her parents refuse to buy her a graphing calculator, Sophie inadvertently helps several classmates in her quest to undermine her parents' wishes – and ends up with several loyal friends. In Donald J. Sobol's *Encyclopedia Brown: Boy*

Detective, 10-year-old Leroy “Encyclopedia” Brown uses his above average intelligence and knowledge to solve crimes his police chief father is stumped by as well as crimes neighborhood kids bring to his detective agency. 12-year-old Reynie Muldoon finds acceptance and purpose as a member of *The Mysterious Benedict Society* (Trenton Lee Stewart), working with other exceptionally bright children to foil the world-domination-via-mind-control plot of the evil Ledroptha Curtain. In *Maizon at Blue Hill* (Jacqueline Woodson) 12-year-old main character, Maizon Singh, deals with belonging, self-esteem, identity, and re-examining her own ideas when her excellent grades land her at a prestigious and unfamiliar (racially, culturally, and socio-economically) boarding school far from her friends and beloved grandmother. Millicent Min is an eleven-year-old genius character from Lisa Yee’s *Millicent Min, Girl Genius*. Millicent deals with finding true friends who like her for who she is/in spite of what she is while navigating taking advanced classes, being forced to play volleyball, and having to tutor an unappreciative age mate. Dewey Kerrigan is also an extremely gifted eleven-year-old in Ellen Klages’ *The Green Glass Sea*. She deals with coming of age in WWII era Los Alamos amongst the geniuses of the Manhattan Project – secrecy, fear, and being ostracized due to her abilities in math and science are all themes of the book. Dissimilar in tone, Roald Dahl’s *Matilda* features Matilda Wormwood a child genius denied access to challenging education by her parents and sinister school headmistress. She uses her intellect (and subsequent superpowers) to avenge her only ally (her teacher) and eventually secure herself a better home life and school experience. Jessie Treski should be going into third grade but is about to skip to her brother’s fourth grade class in the more realistic *The Lemonade War*, by Jacqueline Davies. Their sibling rivalry takes the

form of a vicious lemonade stand competition, where Jessie's math skills shine and her people skills are put to the test. *Artemis Fowl* (Eoin Colfer) features twelve-year-old super genius and evil mastermind Artemis, as he combines his precocious intellect and child-like belief in magic to exploit the fairies for gold to aid him in restoring his family's fortune. Brenton Damagatchi and Judy Douglas are fifth-grade students caught up in an investigation into Brenton's homework machine in Dan Gutman's *The Homework Machine*. Where Judy is an over-achieving gifted and talented student, Brenton is miles ahead of her intelligence-wise, creating a program to do his homework for him in order to free up time to study "psychology, physics, and medicine," (Gutman, 2006, p. 39).

Secondary Characters

Abigail Lee, Chloe Garfinkle, and Noah Youkilis are all genius IQ middle school students at the local gifted academy in Gordon Korman's *Ungifted*. Abigail is brilliant and grade-conscious, Chloe is gifted but desires normalcy, and Noah is so impossibly genius he wants to eschew the system entirely. George "Sticky" Washington and Constance Contraire are Reynie's intellectually gifted friends in *The Mysterious Benedict Society*. Sticky is around Reynie's age with a perfect memory, broad knowledge of an amazing variety of subjects, and a nervous demeanor. Operating at a similar level to Reynie and Sticky, Constance is petulant, spoiled, and contrary... which is understandable as the last chapter reveals she is only two years old. Five-year-old Charles Wallace Murry and fourteen-year-old Calvin O'Keefe are featured in Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. Where Charles Wallace is an otherworldly, precocious genius bullied by local children, Calvin is a popular and gifted student who excels both

academically (he is in eleventh grade at fourteen) and socially. Twelve-year-old David Menlo is similarly otherworldly, a child of the old-magic and a gifted sorcerer whose academic ability, inquisitiveness, and eventual knowledge surpasses that of the most gifted professors at the magical boarding school Rowan in Henry H. Neff's *The Hound of Rowan*. Hermione Granger is another studious and gifted student in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. At eleven years old she excels in all of her subjects, despite a lack of a wizarding upbringing, the result being she is a trusted source of information and a bit of a know-it-all. Twelve-year-old Annabeth Chase is a similarly academically gifted child in Rick Riordan's *The Lightning Thief*. Annabeth's monster-slaying abilities are surpassed only by her gifts in strategy and architecture, ostensibly inherited from her mother, the Greek goddess Athena.

General Depiction

Gender was fairly evenly distributed, with a little over half of the characters being described as female (fourteen out of twenty-three). Age-wise, all of the characters analyzed were between the ages of two and fourteen. As most of the books were geared towards ages 9-12, most of the characters tended to fall between those ages as well. Out of the twenty-three characters, fourteen fell into this age range. Distribution is as follows:

Constance (2)

Matilda, Charles Wallace (5)

Jessie, Sophie (assumed 8; should be going into third grade)

Encyclopedia, Nora, Brenton, Judy (assumed 10; fifth grade)

Melody, Millicent, Dewey, David, Hermione (11)

Reynie, Sticky, Maizon, Artemis, Annabeth (12)

Abigail, Chloe, Noah (assumed 13-14; eighth grade)

Calvin (14)

Out of the twenty-three, it is either implied or mentioned that sixteen are Caucasian, three are of Asian descent, and four are African-American. When compared to the actual breakdown of the United States' racial demographics, this selection of books was fairly consistent. Census.gov lists the racial breakdown for 2014 as 77.4% White, 13.2% Black, and 5.4% Asian whereas out of twenty-three characters observed in the chapter books 69.5% were White, 17.4% were Black, and 13% were Asian. The worrying trend here was that out of all twenty-three characters no characters were described as Hispanic, a demographic listed on the same site as making up 17.4% of the United States' population.

As far as family dynamics go, most characters were described as only children (eleven out of twenty-three). Five characters had no information given about their status within the family, two were eldest children and four were youngest. Out of all of the characters only one was described as a middle child – Calvin O'Keefe from *A Wrinkle in Time* was said to be the third out of eleven children. Skewing towards only children could be seen as a method the author used to focus on the story of the gifted character or

as a method of increasing the character's isolation. However, only two characters were described as orphans (a state that is quickly remedied for both gifted characters at the end of *The Mysterious Benedict Society*). Most gifted characters had married biological parents, however (twelve out of twenty-three). One stepfamily was mentioned (Annabeth Chase in *The Lightning Thief*), one grandparent-as-guardian (Maizon Singh in *Maizon at Blue Hill*), one single-father household (Dewey Kerrigan in *The Green Glass Sea*), and three single-mothers. Three characters had no background information of this type mentioned. Adoption was mentioned (and eventually practiced) in three books, but none of the four characters were impacted by adoption until the ends of their books. Money issues were mentioned in five characters' stories and neglect of the gifted character was present twice.

Themes

Isolation. Throughout the course of each of the novels one theme usually showed up – isolation. Out of the twenty-three characters studied, only six characters were not described as being or feeling isolated by their intellectual gifts. Of those six only one was isolated due to secondary effects of her giftedness – Maizon Singh. Prior to leaving Brooklyn she is described as having good friends and a supportive home life with her beloved grandmother, however her giftedness awards her a boarding school scholarship. This separation from what she knew, not the giftedness itself is what causes her isolation (Woodson, 1992, p. 6). Judy Douglas and Constance Contraire are never described as particularly isolated while David Menlo's otherness (being a child of old magic) is not something the author depicts as isolating him. Rather, it is used as a way for the reader to

know David is special and to be viewed as different from other characters. Annabeth Chase is described as feeling isolated, though for reasons other than her intellectual abilities, which are seen as typical and expected of a child of Athena. Annabeth relates to Percy she had issues staying in one place for long, and being at odds with authority figures due to dyslexia and ADHD (Riordan, 2005, p., 88). Matilda Wormwood is very bright, but she is never described as feeling isolation due to this; she seeks out friends and role models that she gets along with and ignores (or punishes in the case of the criminal characters) others. Dahl describes her interactions with others:

It was therefore easy for Matilda to make friends with other children. All those in her class liked her. They knew of course that she was “clever” because they had heard her being questioned by Miss Honey on the first day of term. (Dahl, 1988, p. 101)

For the other seventeen characters, sub-themes related to giftedness and isolation are often present: desire for acceptance and/or belonging and presence of stereotypes related to social, emotional, and physical development.

Acceptance, “normalcy,” and belonging. While not a unique theme to children’s literature portraying gifted youth, desiring acceptance does play a big part in most of the books read, especially due to the characters’ sense of isolation. In some cases, characters are shown desiring some idea of “normalcy” as in their minds it encompasses a better way of life, a happier and more accepted existence. Book after book showed characters weighing the importance of their intellectual gifts against the problems it causes them connecting to others, and trying to come to some sort of positive resolution... or being forced to a positive resolution.

Jessie's main fear is not fitting in among her new fourth-grade classmates due to her being a year younger than everyone and atypically bright. She has already dealt with being ostracized by age mates in the form of classmates forming a "We Hate Jessie" club the year before (Davies, 2007, p. 72-73). In order to prevent this reoccurring, and after deciding she cannot rely on her older brother for support, Jessie actively seeks out friendships in which to prove herself cool, or at the very least normal (Davies, 2007, p. 14, 46). Her internal war between what she knows and her desire for normalcy is especially present when she is faced with a bullying friend of her brother's tormenting her about grade skipping. Davies writes, "Jessie felt cold and hot at the same time. Part of her wanted to yell, "That doesn't make any sense!" But the other part of her felt so *freakish* – like Scott had just noticed she had three legs," (Davies, 2007, p. 24). In this moment Jessie knows what the boy is saying is not true, but his words highlight her worries about being different, her fear of future isolation, and also partially spur her on to search for new friendships and acceptance.

Chloe Garfinkle is also concerned about her acceptance amongst peers, though her thought process is predictably more complex as she is an eighth-grader rather than a would-be third-grader. Her character's introduction is a litany of observations on the pitfalls of giftedness, from lack of personal time (too many academic activities and too much homework) to lack of personal lives (Korman, 2012, p. 31-33). She is especially concerned about the lack of "normal" activities in the lives of gifted students, as defined by her perception of normal middle-school activities:

Friends? Those are the people you slave alongside... Sports? When?...What about TV or video games? Oh, please. You're far too smart for that. Pep rallies?

For what – the robotics team? Forget it – and the same goes for school dances, funny-hat day, drama club, charity drives... (Korman, 2012, p. 32).

She even goes as far as to proclaim how far from normal she feels when she states that “Every day millions of kids around this country do millions of normal activities, and they have a great time at it. Why can’t we?” (Korman, 2012, p. 33) Chloe truly believes she is missing out on a key part of existence due specifically to her intellectual giftedness, something she values and also questions the value of. Throughout the course of the book she weighs what she sees as weaknesses in her world (the gifted) with what she sees as the underappreciated strengths of the non-gifted world, specifically the strengths of average student Donovan. Similarly, Chloe’s classmate Noah also questions the importance placed on his intelligence and the lack of importance placed on concepts he values – laughter and freedom. He figures he might as well go to the local public school (as opposed to the gifted academy) for all the good school does and derive some comfort from laughing and feeling unpressured (Korman, 2012, p. 102-103).

While Charles Wallace has little care for gaining acceptance from anyone in *A Wrinkle in Time*, Calvin does express some thoughts on the matter. His home life is far from ideal, being one of eleven children of uninvolved and uninterested parents. He describes himself as a biological sport with little in common intellectually or personality-wise with them (L’Engle, 1962, p. 38-39). He greatly desires connectedness with family, trying to encourage familial behavior in his mother and siblings (L’Engle, 1962, p. 46-47). When Calvin finally finds the Murry family, he expresses his joy at finally feeling understood, and states “I’ve never even seen your house, and I have the funniest feeling that for the first time in my life I’m going home!” (L’Engle, 1962, p. 44). Calvin, a good

student and fairly popular boy, nonetheless is portrayed as being somehow separate. But where previous characters mentioned looked for broad acceptance from their peer group, Calvin is simply thrilled by finding a few people that are on the same wavelength as him – Charles Wallace and his older sister, Meg Murry. He enthuses to Meg, “There hasn’t been anybody, anybody in the world I could talk to. Sure, I can function on the same level as everybody else, I can hold myself down, but it isn’t me,” (L’Engle, 1962, p. 52). Charles Wallace, in contrast, has always had people who understood him in his family. This is not to say that Charles Wallace is depicted as largely accepted by society; at five years old he and his family are aware others do not get him. Meg recounts people in their town gossiping about her and her brother early in *A Wrinkle in Time*: “...that unattractive girl and the baby boy certainly aren’t all there,” (L’Engle, 1962, p. 13).

Millicent Min is far less sure about what exactly she wants in companions. She desires connectedness and acceptance, but fails to truly realize she is a child. Her early efforts include taking a college course in order to be around her “intellectual peers” (failing to understand college freshmen are not necessarily intellectual) and subsequently dealing with students not appreciating her academic enthusiasm and being manipulated into doing a college “friend’s” homework (Yee, 2003, p. 8, 19-20, 37). It is only when Millicent meets positive, bubbly, age mate Emily that she begins to consider whether or not she will be accepted as a friend for what she is, a genius. She lies about her background to Emily (calling herself an average homeschooler rather than an eleven-year-old rising high school senior), and tries to create a façade of “normalcy” in order to retain Emily’s friendship (Yee, 2003, p. 47-48, 87).

Not all gifted characters have the same desire for acceptance, or at least not the same preoccupation with it. Hermione Granger (who is admittedly described through Harry's eyes, so her emotions and desires are somewhat removed as a result) is shown to express sadness with regards to her social status among her fellow first-years. When a frustrated Ron spews that "It's no wonder no one can stand her," and "She must've noticed she's got no friends," Hermione runs off in tears to cloister herself in the girls' bathroom for hours (Rowling, 1997, p. 172). However, this is the only time the reader is given any indication that Hermione has issues with being accepted and is bothered by it. Nora Rowley of Clements' *The Report Card* does not have such issues with acceptance, per se. She just considers being seen as normal as a preferable lifestyle and enjoys being "a part of the class" (Clements, 2004, p. 21). Her only real concern is for her best friend, Stephen, who she worries will be bothered if he finds out she has been hiding her genius all their lives. When she finally comes clean to him, her fears seem to be realized – "I could hear it in Stephen's voice. What I'd always been afraid of. Stephen was already starting to think I was weird. Weird Nora, the genius girl," (Clements, 2004, p. 105). These fears are ultimately reconciled with Nora and Stephen once again being on pre-genius announcement terms. Here Nora states, "Stephen talked to me like a friend. Like I was a normal person. Just me, Nora. At that moment nothing could have made me happier," (Clements, 2004, p. 173). In this statement, the reader is exposed to Nora's perception that her intellect causes her to be treated differently, that there is a "normal" way to be treated and it is preferable. The over-attention to her intellect has overshadowed other parts of her personality that she considers just as important. The worrying thing, however, is when Nora lists "normal" activities for a child her age as if

they are somehow disallowed to a gifted child by adults, which would alienate her further from her peers and her best friend:

What if what I really want is to be normal? What if being normal is my big goal in life? Is there anything wrong with that? To be happy and read books and hang out with my friends and play soccer and listen to music... I want to use *my* intelligence the way *I* want to use it. And right now I want to be a normal kid. (Clements, 2004, p. 169)

In this instance, Nora's intelligence itself is not alienating her, though. It is the adult characters' response to her intelligence.

Dewey Kerrigan and Melody Brooks have largely given up on acceptance in their books. Dewey only "looked right at Joyce, but said nothing" when teased by a group of girls calling her "Screwy Dewey" (Klages, 2006, p. 66). She does not try to fit in overly much, content with the company of her father, a female scientist role model, and some older boys that have similar interests. She is well aware of the other children's perceptions of her as her eventual friend Suze succinctly puts it, "I don't like her. No one does," (Klages, 2006, p. 132). She unexpectedly finds acceptance in the form of her role model's daughter (Suze) and the rest of the Gordon family. She goes from feeling the depths of isolation and betrayal when she believes the Gordons have abandoned her, newly orphaned, to feeling like she belongs with them when she discovers they are including her in the family trip (Klages, 2006, p. 301-302). Melody Brooks' story takes a different turn, though she also does not actively expect acceptance. Her reason is less from experience with people not understanding her intellectual interests and more from people not expecting anything from her due to her cerebral palsy. She expresses in her inner commentary that "...there's nobody else like *me*. It's like I live in a cage with no

door and no key. And I have no way to tell someone how to get me out,” (Draper, 2010, p. 38). After unexpectedly making what she considered friendships with fellow quiz bowl members, she is devastated when they casually leave her out of the final competition (Draper, 2010, p. 288-292). However, Melody’s intelligence is not the catalyst for this lack of acceptance; it is actually a reason she was able to connect in spite of her disabilities. Melody also expresses the importance she places on being what she considers “normal” (“I can’t even get *mad* like a normal kid.”), but this “normal” she talks of is not related to intelligence but rather having a disability or not (Draper, 2010, p. 263).

Three characters take a completely opposite approach to acceptance: they do not care for it whatsoever. In fact, the acceptance theme in their books is less about them desiring it on some level and more about them having it foisted upon them. Sophie Simon’s parents worry about her isolation, but as far as Sophie is concerned “having friends sounded like a waste of time,” (Graff, 2010, p. 8). In the course of the book Sophie inadvertently manages to make friends. While she is initially confused as to what to do with her newfound situation, their concern for her and their understanding of her desire for a graphing calculator finally lead her to accept acceptance (Graff, 2010, p. 88, 92). Graff writes, “Maybe, Sophie thought, just maybe, she might actually like having friends,” (Graff, 2010, p. 92). *Artemis Fowl*’s parents are not as concerned for their son’s acceptance by his peers or society, as one is missing and the other is delusional until the very end of the book. Artemis himself is completely uninterested, as his main goal is to re-establish his family’s fortune and nothing else. He is portrayed as isolated throughout

the book, masterminding plan after plan with only his bodyguard for a confidant. His intellectual otherness is noted by his bodyguard early in *Artemis Fowl*:

Always two steps ahead, that was Master Artemis. People said he was a chip off the old block. They were wrong. Master Artemis was a brand new block, the likes of which had never been seen before. Doubts assuaged, Butler... [left] his employer to unravel the secrets of the universe.

Brenton Damagatchi is similarly unimpressed by his overall acceptance by his peers. Like Sophie, he sees no point in friendships (Gutman, 2006, p. 53). It is also painfully obvious to others that he is isolated. As *The Homework Machine* is told from multiple perspectives, readers are able to see what others think of Brenton's isolation and overall acceptance, and it is largely negative. Gutman's other characters tell the reader that Brenton's lack of acceptance, which he is not bothered by, is a very strange and bad thing. Brenton's teacher expresses that "It's so rare to see a boy like Sam forming a friendship with a boy like Brenton," and later describes him as "unpopular" and "shunned" (Gutman, 2006, p. 60, 90). After Brenton begins to hang out with three other children while they use his homework machine, his mother ignorantly assumes he has made friends and expresses pleasure that "Brenton was forming a small group of friends. Finally!" and that he was beginning to "fit in" (Gutman, 2006, p. 56). Both of these authority figures of the character believe he is operating at a deficit. Later on, when the four children actually have banded together as friends, the reader is shown that Brenton was acceptable all along, that other characters have noticed this, and that Brenton himself has made peace with the idea that having friends can be a good thing (Gutman, 2006, p. 138-139). His new friend Sam expresses that:

In the beginning of the year we all thought Brenton was a dork of the highest order. But I decided that Brenton was probably the coolest kid I ever met... It's not cool to *try* to be cool. It's cool to *not* try to be cool. Brenton just does his own thing.

Stereotypes. Another theme that was seen in several of the selected titles was the occurrence of gifted stereotypes. As mentioned earlier, a child's accelerated cognitive development would not affect their physical, emotional, or social development directly. Unfortunately, and also mentioned before, there still persists in media the stereotype of intellectually gifted individuals being socially awkward or obtuse, physically less capable, or both. This is not to say that these traits cannot coincide with intellectual giftedness in real life, just that coincidence should probably not be represented overmuch in the selection of titles.

Out of twenty-three characters, only seven characters were shown to have atypical physical development or be less physically capable. Of these seven, one was due to being twice exceptional (Melody Brooks' intelligence as well as cerebral palsy) and one was simply described as "very tiny," though this could be due to age rather than development (Dahl, 1988, p. 70). David Menlo is briefly mentioned as "a small boy with skin as pale as milk. The boy's features were small and faint, except for purplish circles beneath his eyes. He looked unhealthy, like an underexposed photograph," (Neff, 2007, p. 65). Dewey Kerrigan is described as "small for her age, thin and wiry," and over the course of *The Green Glass Sea* corrects people about her age as they tend to believe she is seven rather than a ten-, later eleven, year-old (Klages, 2006, p. 1, 4, 31). She is also described as having one leg that is shorter than the other, though this is explained to be due to an accident rather than her physical development (Klages, 2006, p. 143). Millicent

Min and Maizon Singh are described as uncoordinated at sports rather than anything else, physically (Yee, 2003, p. 44-51; Woodson, 1992, p. 76). Noah Youkilis is specifically described in the context of giftedness and physical capability being linked as “skinny” and later as “a four-foot-eleven praying mantis suffering from extreme malnutrition, with a long nose and glasses that were last in style when President Truman wore them” (Korman, 2012, p. 32, 49).

Portrayals of physical stereotypes are also occasionally turned on their heads, however. Three characters, Nora Rowley, Annabeth Chase, and Calvin O’Keefe, are described as physically dexterous. Calvin is on the high school basketball team at fourteen (only because of his height, according to him), Annabeth is excellent at slaying monsters throughout the entirety of *The Lightning Thief*, and Nora is talented at soccer (L’Engle, 1962, p. 37; Clements, 2004, p. 82-84). Annabeth, Maizon, and Calvin are specifically referred to as tall for their ages, and Annabeth is also described as “athletic looking” (L’Engle, 1962, p. 37; Woodson, 1992, p. 76; Riordan, 2005, p. 63).

As for the portrayal of stereotypes regarding social and emotional development, only five out of twenty-three characters displayed any problems or were described as having any social or emotional awkwardness of some sort. Out of these five, two were described in terms of being naïve more than awkward, or perhaps unpracticed. Chloe Garfinkle is shown to not be aware that two boys were only showing her attention to make fun of her, as her friend Donovan notices, “they were only building her up so they could drop her over a cliff and walk away laughing,” to which she responds by getting angry when Donovan intercedes on her behalf, not understanding the social dynamics of

the situation (Korman, 2012, p. 136-137). Millicent Min has issues making friends with the people she is around in school, as they are far older than her as she has skipped several grades. When she does finally meet an age mate she gets along with, she attacks the challenge of friendship with her typical academic nature – devising her idea of appropriate slumber party activities, giving advice, navigating fights, and generally bonding (Yee, 2003, p. 69-76, 84-90, 184-185, 206-207). Any difficulty she has is fairly typical for an eleven-year-old, and is more indicative of lack of practice than anything else. Millicent's social awkwardness could only be seen, therefore, as a secondary effect of her giftedness.

Noah Youkilis is shown as being socially out of it, as a direct result of his giftedness. His perception of the world is portrayed as so far removed from anyone else due to his intelligence, that he is quite simply operating on a different wavelength. His friend Donovan mentions at the end of *Ungifted*, "...the three of us formed a bodyguard unit to keep him from being wedgied to death. Who knows what would have happened without us... But Noah *was* the biggest dweeb who'd ever walked the face of the earth," (Korman, 2012, p. 278). Charles Wallace and Jessie Treski are the only characters overtly said to have problems socially. It is only mentioned of Charles Wallace in passing early on in *A Wrinkle in Time*, that he "seldom spoke when anybody [outside of the family] was around," and, according to his older brother Dennys,

"Charles Wallace is going to have an awful time next year when he starts school. *We* know he's bright, but he's so funny when he's around other people, and they're so used to thinking he's dumb, I don't know what's going to happen to him." (L'Engle, 1962, p., 13, 30)

Jessie's social problems are the most noticeable. She routinely has issues deciphering what people are *really* saying (reading others' emotions and facial expressions) such as when she does not understand why her big brother is not happy to be in the same class as her or how waving her lemonade stand earnings with a big grin on her face would make him, her lemonade stand rival, angry (Davies, 2007, p. 15, 41-43). She says of herself after making him angry, "That's exactly what had happened. But Jessie knew something else entirely had happened. And she didn't get it. The way she didn't get a lot of things about people," (Davies, 2007, p. 43). Her brother, Evan, also knows Jessie has problems understanding social interactions and emotions. He coaches her on how people work; his advice is shown to the reader in flashbacks as Jessie tries to utilize it in other social interactions (Davies, 2007, p. 50-53). The most obvious example of Jessie struggling (and in this instance failing) to understand social and emotional interactions is a flashback to a time in second-grade. She did not understand the social subtext of several mean girls, when forced by a teacher to accept all classmates as members of their club, taking great joy in giving Jessie multiple member badges and laughing the whole time. Jessie eventually learns that the "Wild Hot Jellybeans" club had actually been the "We Hate Jessie" club the entire time (Davies, 2007, p. 71-74). In Jessie's own words, "feelings were her weakest subject," (Davies, 2007, p. 11).

On a positive note, no other characters were shown to have any type of stereotypical problem socially or emotionally. Most are shown to be fairly average, with some excelling with peers both age-wise and intellectually.

Realistic portrayal of the gifted population. With regards to the realism of the portrayal of intellectually gifted characters, the selected titles as a whole were analyzed as if they were a representation of intellectually gifted students as a whole. Out of the twenty-three characters, only ten could be said to be completely within what should have been the most populated range of cognitive giftedness. This range, according to the literature mentioned previously would include children with *at most* a chronological age to mental age difference of six years, or exceptionally gifted. By Gross's estimation of the distribution of gifted individuals in the population, the majority of the characters (if they realistically represent intellectually gifted children as a whole) should fall within this range, with *very* few characters exhibiting behavior in the profoundly gifted range, or cognitive operation surpassing six years' difference. Over half of the characters (thirteen out of twenty-three), however, could be seen as profoundly gifted. Of the other ten characters, five are described as very academic/singled out for gifted classes but are fairly challenged by subject material aimed at their chronological age (David Menlo, Hermione Granger, Maizon Singh, Encyclopedia Brown, and Judy Douglas). Of these five, Encyclopedia is questionable as there is very little character growth that goes on in *Encyclopedia Brown*, *Boy Detective* and the idea that a child may need more challenging material than what their grade is provided would not have been very prevalent at the time of its publication. The other five are shown to have either a knowledge base consistent with a child a few years older or are explicitly said to have skipped one to three grades in order to be academically challenged (Annabeth Chase, Jessie Treski, Calvin O'Keefe, Melody Brooks, and Dewey Kerrigan).

The Mysterious Benedict Society's three intellectually gifted characters are shown to be functioning at profoundly gifted levels. Reynie's problem-solving skills and understanding of topics is more on par with his adult tutor and companion, Miss Perumal. With her he discusses current events and learns her native language (Tamil) as he is far too advanced for her to teach any other subjects. Reynie's situation is described early on: "Reynie had already completed all the textbooks on his own, even those for high school students...Miss Perumal didn't quite know what to do with Reynie..." (Stewart, 2007, p. 2).

Sticky's gigantic knowledge base is what sets him apart as profoundly gifted. He is described at age seven as having "carried more information in his head than a college professor, perhaps *two* professors, with an engineer thrown in to boot," and off-handedly remarks at age eleven that "I can read most languages but I have trouble speaking anything but English," (Stewart, 2007, p. 70, 122). Constance is intellectually enigmatic for most of the book, her only strength seems to be her stubbornness and pithy comebacks. It is only at the end of the book, after witnessing her interact with the other children at their profoundly gifted level, that we learn she is actually only two years old. Therefore, each child is operating cognitively over six years older than their chronological ages – Reynie at least seven years difference, Sticky at least twenty years difference, and Constance at least sixteen years difference.

Charles Wallace could be seen as having the intellect of someone at the very least twenty years older than him. His vocabulary rivals that of a child more than twice his age, and his family understands this and replies in kind, using their complete vocabulary with the five-year-old. His mother simply converses with him during an early conversation, shortly after he emerged from complete silence into complete sentences:

““Let’s be exclusive,” Charles Wallace said. “That’s my new word for the day. Impressive, isn’t it?” “Prodigious,” Mrs. Murry said,” (L’Engle, 1962, p. 16). His mother also relates that no one is quite a match for Charles Wallace’s understanding of the world (L’Engle, 1962, p. 24). His other abilities defining complex science terms and concepts from memory, as well as foraying into knowledge and practical application of the scientific theories his parents have been working on (L’Engle, 1962, p. 38, 85-89).

Brenton’s actions in making a complex computer program that searches out information related to homework problems scanned into it and then produces answers in the homework owner’s handwriting certainly sets him apart from his fifth-grade peers. His teacher describes him as needing “to be in a school for special students like himself. He should be taking high school-level classes,” (Gutman, 2006, p. 40). Also, over the course of the book a headhunter from a marketing business stalks Brenton. The business esteems Brenton’s insight into psychology so much it wants to hire someone chronologically in the fifth grade (Gutman, 2006, p. 143-146). I can be assumed from these statements that ten-year-old Brenton can function at the level of someone seven years older at the very least.

Artemis Fowl’s intellect is described as so fantastically advanced, he can only be described as profoundly gifted. He is described as “bamboozle[ing] every test thrown at him” and flabbergasting those that study him such that they leave, “gibbering to their own hospitals,” (Colfer, 2001, p. 1). He devises computer programs to translate ancient fairy documents and manipulates their entire army (including their commander, Root, and

resident tech genius, Foaly (Colfer, 2001, p. 25, 110-111, 126, 202). His abilities lead both to wonder if he is “either a genius or crazy,” (Colfer, 2001, p. 159).

Matilda’s abilities are related in less extreme language, mainly through her teacher’s assessment of her abilities at the beginning of her first day of school. She demonstrates mathematic ability that causes Miss Honey to think, “She had never come across a five-year-old before, or indeed a ten-year-old who could multiply with such facility,” and reads books by authors more suited to adults (Tolkien, Hemingway, and Charles Dickens are mentioned) (Dahl, 1988, p. 70-81). Miss Honey also believes she needs a more rigorous academic life, stating “I seriously believe that she could be brought up to university standard in two or three years with the proper coaching,” (Dahl, 1988, p. 99).

Nora Rowley starts off seeming like an average fifth-grader, but the reader is quickly introduced to her profound genius. She not only is not average, she has purposefully made her grades average her entire school career as a part of her observation of humanity (Clements, 2004, p. 12-29). She learned to read at one year old; her activities include researching alternative energy sources, corresponding with field experts, and taking online college courses for fun (Clements, 2004, p. 12, 68).

Sophie (age eight) is also profoundly gifted, as she is more of a super-genius stereotype than a fully fleshed-out character. She studies college-level subjects independently (calculus), has mastered several languages (Russian, Japanese, and Latin), and has “successfully performed open-heart surgery on an earthworm,” (Graff, 2010, p. 4-13). Millicent is also very much a super-genius stereotype, though her character does

experience character growth and does exhibit emotional depth. Her resume lists that she has skipped five grades, is already attending college classes, and actively reads research articles for her own enjoyment – all at age eleven (Yee, 2003, p. 1, 18, 70). Other largely stereotypically super-genius characters are Chloe Garfinkle, Noah Youkilis, and Abigail Lee (IQs listed as 159, 206, 171, respectively) (Korman, 2012, p. 31, 100, 265).

Conclusions

It seems that gifted characters are considered an interesting and viable subject for authors to write about, as finding titles featuring them was not difficult. The characters were largely portrayed as fortunate to have such intellect, though most novels paired this with struggles that would not be seen as a preferable situation to have. The main struggle directly related to their intellectual giftedness was isolation and the related sub-themes of acceptance, desire for “normalcy,” and belonging. Most characters were shown to have positive resolutions to this conflict, which is a positive portrayal of giftedness and individuals considered gifted. The only exceptions were Maizon, Melody, and Abigail. The first two characters were left with more questions than answers at the ends of their books, though they were shown to have positive support systems in place to help them navigate these questions “off screen.” Abigail was a very secondary character that never really desired acceptance, so this could be seen as a positive resolution for her character.

Stereotypes regarding intellectually gifted characters’ non-cognitive development, social/emotional awkwardness and physical issues, were thankfully not overly present in the selection of chapter books. Of the characters demonstrating developmental differences in these non-cognitive areas, most were shown to not be directly related to

their intellectual giftedness. Many of the challenges characters had socially, emotionally, or physically were slight or the result of being twice exceptional. This is encouraging, as readers are not being convinced that intellectual giftedness necessarily equals anything other than intellectual giftedness. Twice exceptional characters, such as Melody or Annabeth, illustrate coincidence of developmental differences matter-of-factly and often show the characters' intellectual giftedness aiding them in these other areas.

Portrayal was a bit more skewed with regards to gifted characters in chapter books providing a realistic example of the actual gifted population of children. 57% of characters could be seen as falling into the "profoundly gifted" range, and many of these characters' intellects could rival those of today's greatest minds. While this makes a great story, much the same way having an orphan main character frees them up for adventure, it is not indicative of reality. Most real gifted children, as indicated in the literature review, are cognitively closer to their average peers. It is understandable that such fantastical portrayals of gifted children are not actually *trying* to represent reality, but nonetheless, readers are influenced by their portrayal. Overrepresentation of the far, far end of the intellectually gifted spectrum could cause some readers to expect that type of behavior or intellect of themselves or others they see as gifted. Happily, most other stereotypes were not present, so readers do not seem to be overexposed to the socially awkward genius misfit trope within children's chapter books.

Overall, portrayal of gifted children in this selection of children's chapter books was positive with attention to real problems mentioned in literature on the subject and avoidance of past stereotypes.

Further Research

Two areas for further research stood out while I was looking into this topic, accuracy of individual characters' cognitive development and the use of gifted characters as plot devices. As a gifted child's cognitive development would probably deviate from traditional models of child development (cognitive), other models would have to be found and used as a gauge.

As I was reading each of these chapter books I often noticed the author using their gifted character to either add validity to an idea the author wanted to emphasize or to provide just the right fact at just the right time to move the plot along. I found myself wondering if having an innocent infant character espouse an adult author's idea somehow made it more palatable or worthy of consideration. I also wondered if some authors only included a gifted character just to be an on hand encyclopedia at crucial moments. It would be interesting to look into the existence and depiction of these characters in chapter books.

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